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Discovering the Grave of William Merrill Collier

AUGUST 3, 2017 8:26 PM \ LEAVE A COMMENT \ BY COLLIERHERITAGE \ EDIT

In the summer of 2012, I, along with several family members from Texas, visited Cousin Virginia Collier Dennis in Barnesville, Georgia. During our conversation I told her I had noticed there were two unmarked graves in the Collier Lot in the Greenwood Cemetery. The graves are actually "marked" with a barren concrete slab but no formal marker. She said I needed to know about the graves, that one might be "one of your people." She said she would write something down for me. Several months later, I received a card from her in which she said she had promised herself to write me about the unmarked graves once she had paid her taxes and finalized her will, but that she had not yet done either as she had not been well. Cousin Virginia passed away September 2013 and I never got the story of the unmarked graves.

A little background is needed. I am descended from Williamson, one of the 13 children of Vines and Sarah Elizabeth Williamson Collier (see several posts related to Vines Collier). The final resting places of several of the 13 are known, particularly in the counties of Upson, Lamar, and Monroe, Georgia. Williamson moved into Upson County at about the same time as his brother Robert and is known to have lived there, but his grave site is unknown. I have long thought it might be one of the graves marked by a simple blank field stone in either the Robert Collier or Isaac Collier cemetery. CHF has placed monuments in both of those cemeteries.

Williamson was married three times. Little is known about his first marriage. His second marriage was to Jemena Powell. Jemena was the sister of Sallie Powell, wife of William Collier, one of Williamson's brothers. Williamson and Jemena had a son named William Merrill Collier. Williamson later married Mary Ann Power. They had one son, Robert Terrell Collier, my ancestor who moved his family from Upson County to Texas in the 1880s.

The papers of Jena Cuthbert (J C) Collier, Cousin Virginia's grandfather, contain his efforts to tie together the extensive Collier lines. His book, if it had ever been finished, would have had details of each of the 13 branches from Vines and Sarah Elizabeth. As I went through the papers of J C Collier, I was pleased to find a reference to William (Merrill) Collier, son of Williamson.

X1- Williamson Collier, likewise son of Vines was born in Oglethorpe Co. Ga. in 1781, he married Jemena Powell in 1803 who was a sister of Sallie Powell that married William Collier. Williamson had a son by the name of William that removed to Upson and Monroe Co. Ga. near The Rock and Barnesville and died around 1872 and he had some grandchildren that were raised in this section and resided and died in Pike County by the name of Vines Hicks who resided at Meansville and Green Hardaway that resided at Piedmont, Ga. Williamson's family will be connected up a little better later on.

I never found that Williamson's family was "connected up" with much detail. However, I was astonished to find that some 50 years after William Merrill had passed away, J C had his body dug up and re-buried in the Collier Lot in Barnesville. This statement was in a letter J C wrote soliciting genealogical information.

BENJAMIN, who was named for his grandfather, Benjamin Williamson, of Virginia, and who married Anne Howard in 1805 and died around 1830. In his will he mentioned the following legatees: Robert, William, Cuthbert, Williamson, Vines, Isaac, Benjamin, John H. Owens, Harrison King Smith, Thomas Dunn, Thomas G. Jones, Benjamin F. Hardeman, and George Benafee. The records show that he removed to Early County, Ga., or it might have been his son.

WILLIAMSON, who likewise came to Georgia from Virginia with his father, Vines, in 1781 and married Jemena Powell in 1803, who was a sister of Sallie Powell that married William. He was likewise named for his grandfather, Benjamin Williamson, of Virginia. Williamson later moved to Upson County, Ga., and had a son by the name of William Merrill. He lived around in Monroe and Upson Counties and died in 1872, and was buried on the farm in Redbone District of Monroe County, which is now Lamar County, and in 1835 his remains were disinterred and removed to lot of J. C. Collier at Barnesville, Georgia. He was buried in a metallic casket which was found to be perfect and which had been in the ground over 50 years and intact in every way. He left three children, all of whom are deceased. Their names were Greene Hardeman, Vines Hicks, and Savannah, who married a Ferguson and left no children.

ROBERT, who married Martha Booker, of Putnam County, on May 1, 1803, and removed to Upson along about 1822 to 1824 and died in 1850 and was buried on the old farm three miles south of The Rock, Georgia. Robert was a large planter, a large slave owner, and owned twenty to thirty plantations. He was a member of the Georgia Legislature four terms, viz.: 1826-27-35-36, and a member of the Georgia State Senate two terms, 1841-43. He raised a large family.

The writer is a great-grandson of Robert and Martha Booker Collier.

Vines had one other son named CUTHBERT Collier, who was born in Oglethorpe County in 1785. He removed along about 1822 to 1824 to Monroe County, Georgia, residing, near Collier's Station on the Central of Georgia Railway. This Station was named for him. He had a son by the name of John Marlin; also several other children. He has descendants living here at Barnesville, Georgia.

There was another Collier residing about this time in Monroe County by the name of John T. Collier, who was a very prosperous planter. But up to the present time have not been able to connect him with this family.

After you have read this letter carefully, I would appreciate it if you would fill in the enclosed blank that I am sending you. Give me all the information possible regarding your antecedents, as I am preparing a Genealogy of the Collier family. Our collateral branch.

The Robert, of Stone, Staffordshire, England, had a grandson, Isaac Collier, Jr., who came to Virginia about 1850. This Isaac Collier married Sarah Lockey, sister of John Edward Lockey, of London, England.

The Vines Collier I speak of is our direct ancestor and was a grandson of this Isaac, who came to America in 1850.

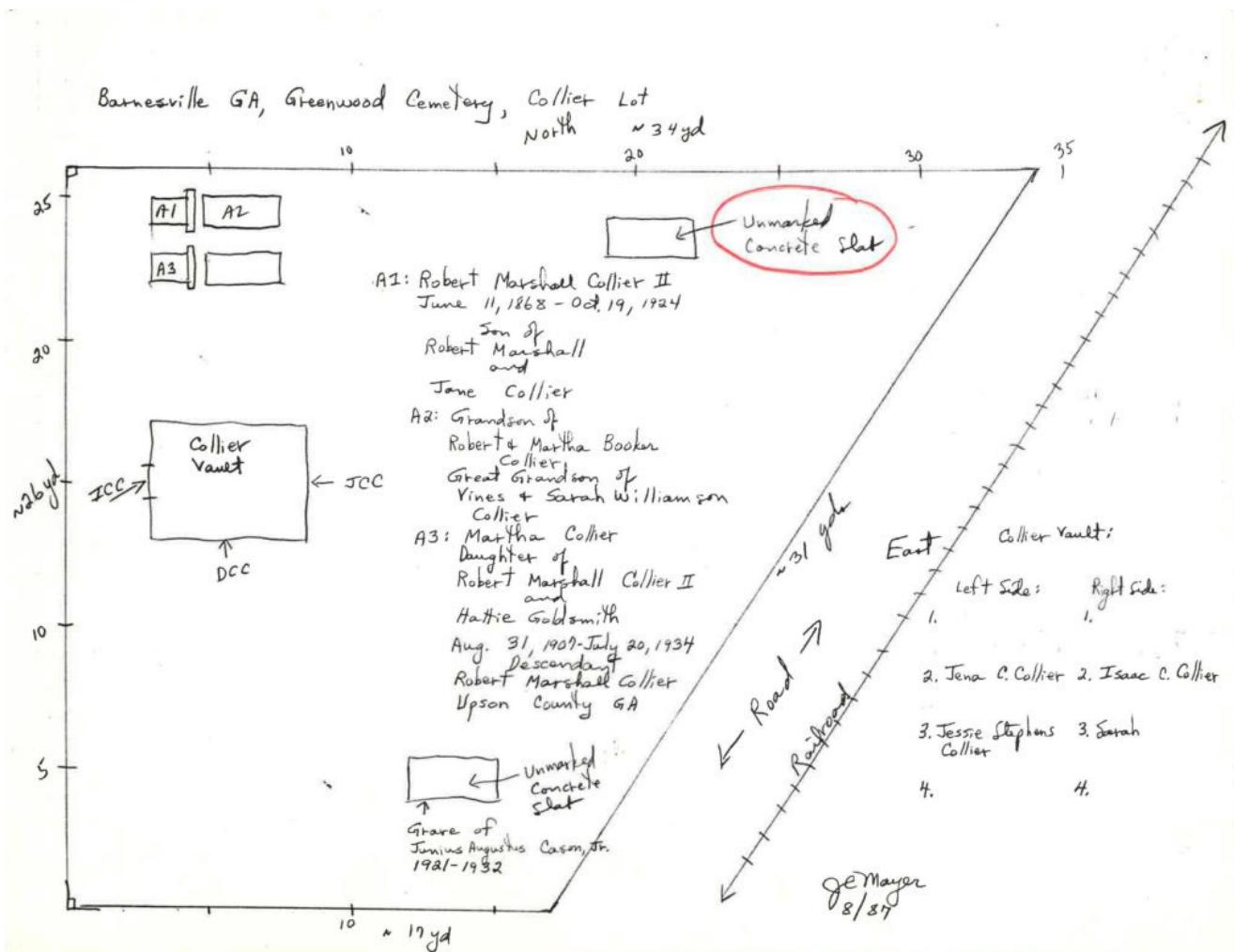
Requesting your attention as promptly as possible after giving same careful thought, I beg to remain

Yours most faithfully,

J. C. Collier.

The Collier Lot is not large and, at the time (1925), there were very few graves there. I have not been able to discover why J C took this action. At the time William Merrill Collier died, J C was only about six years old and would have barely known William Merrill.

Since there was no marked grave of William Merrill Collier in the Collier Lot, he had to be in one of the two graves marked with only a concrete slab. But which one? And why was it never marked? I found the answer to the first question on a map attached to a letter. It identified two graves marked with a concrete slab and identified one of them as being the grave of Junius Augusta Cason, Jr., the son of Junius and Evelyn Collier Cason and grandson of J C Collier. This meant the other grave marked with only a concrete slab was the final resting place of William Merrill Collier, a man my great-grandfather would have called "Uncle William"!



Earlier this year, I asked Elaine Collier Neal to put together the genealogy of William Merrill Collier so that CHF could properly mark the grave. She worked diligently to document each of his four wives and any offspring. We included text that makes the Georgia - Texas connection for Williamson Collier's line. On July 18, 2017, the following marker was placed on the grave of William Merrill Collier in the Collier Lot in Greenwood Cemetery, Barnesville, Georgia.

WILLIAM MERRILL COLLIER

CIRCA 1811 ~ MAR. 15. 1873

BORN IN OGLETHORPE COUNTY, GA

SON OF WILLIAMSON & JEMENA POWELL COLLIER

GRANDSON OF VINES & SARAH ELIZABETH COLLIER

MARRIED 1ST MARTHA A E CASSANS 28 AUG 1834;

MARRIED 2ND ELIZABETH HARTSFIELD, 11 JAN 1837, TO WHICH 3 CHILDREN WERE BORN: GREEN HARDAWAY COLLIER, VINES HICKS COLLIER, AND SAVANNAH COLLIER.

MARRIED 3RD MARY JANE HUGULEY STROUD, WHO DIED CIRCA 1865

MARRIED 4TH MARY G MOYE JACKSON TO WHICH 1 DAUGHTER OPHELIA COLLIER WAS BORN.

WILLIAM MERRILL WAS ORIGINALLY BURIED IN THE REDBONE DISTRICT, MONROE COUNTY (NOW LAMAR COUNTY). ABOUT 1923, AT THE DIRECTION OF JENA C. COLLIER, HIS BODY WAS REINTERRED IN THIS FAMILY PLOT.

WILLIAM MERRILL WAS HALF-BROTHER TO ROBERT TERRELL COLLIER (SON OF WILLIAMSON AND MARY ANN GARLAND POWERS). IN THE EARLY 1880s, ROBERT TERRELL MOVED HIS FAMILY FROM UPSON COUNTY, GA TO EAST TEXAS, WITH DESCENDANTS EVENTUALLY SETTLING IN NACOGDOCHES COUNTY. ROBERT TERRELL COLLIER WAS BURIED IN GLENWOOD CEMETERY IN UPSHUR COUNTY, TX.

COLLIER HERITAGE FOUNDATION, 2017



Assisting with the placement were (L to R) Josh Rhodes, Daniel Johnson, Glen Collier, and members of the local SCV Camp Al Medcalf, David Shepard, and Milo Wimberly. Photograph by Dillon Johnson, g-g-g-g-g- grandson of Vines Collier.

Glen A. Collier

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